



Helping Hands

Offering a helping hand to School Readiness Providers
A publication from Childcare Resource & Referral



Family Engagement

February Activities for Children

Get ready for an EPIC month with these clever, fun, and unique February Activities for Kids. These February activities are perfect for kids of all ages from toddler, preschool, pre-k, kindergarten, first grade, 2nd grade, and 3rd grade students. We've included February activities for school age from Valentines Day activities, Groundhog Day activities, winter theme activities, presidents' day activities, polar bear activities, and so many more!

Some examples of activities include:

- * Valentine's Day Fluffy Slime
- * Glitter Jar of Floating Hearts
- * Love Bug Playdoh

To read the full article and see additional activities please visit their website.

<https://www.123homeschool4me.com/february-activities-for-kids/>



Episcopal Children's Services

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Inside this issue:

ELC of North Florida Updates	2
Heart Exploration	3
Marbled Hearts	4
Shadow Tracing	5
Cupid Crunch	6
Taming Tempers	7-8
What Can I Do?	9
February Fun	10
T.E.A.C.H	11
Professional Development	11
VPK Corner	12

ATTENTION HH READERS...

If you have a question, comment, or concern you would like addressed in an upcoming issue of *Helping Hands*, please send an e-mail to: Brianna.Deosca@ecs4kids.org We will do our best to find the answer, post the comment, and address the concern.



ELC of North FL Updates

The ELC of N. Florida and Episcopal Children's Services is pleased to announce it's 2024 teacher of the year award winners.

The Pre-school teacher winner is Shelley Maurer from Baker Pre-K center in Macclenney. The infant/toddler winner is Isabel Molina from KinderCare at Oakleaf in Orange Park.

They were surprised by a prize visit on January 10th with special Guest Pete the Cat. The winners will be honored at the upcoming annual ELC of N. Florida Early Educators Conference being held on Saturday, January 25th at the Thrasher Horne Conference Center.

The winners will each receive a \$500 cash prize thanks to the generosity of Kaplan Early Learning and the Clay Electric Foundation.



Shelley Maurer from Baker County PreK in Macclenney.



Isabel Molina from KinderCare at Oakleaf in Orange Park



Heart Exploration Brianna DeOsca, Education Specialist

Resources: <https://theeducatorsspinonit.com/hands-on-activities-for-your-baby-to/>

Infants learn through touch and exploring through their environment. This website has lots of activities that are centered around Valentine's Day and hearts. One activity is so simple and easy. Babies love containers! They love filling and dumping them, even if it drives us a little bonkers. Go to any store and get heart shaped containers (you can even wait until after Valentines when everything goes on sale). These containers can be any size and ones with lids are even better. Sit down with your infant and allow them to take the lid off and help them put it back on. Don't forget to praise them when they put the lid on by themselves. To further the activity, get smaller objects like, chunky blocks, pompoms, other heart shaped things, etc. Have the infant fill the container with the objects and talk with them as they play.

CLASS connections:

Facilitated Exploration: Be involved by playing with infants, give them space to explore the hearts. Keep the activity infant focused by following their lead and interests. Expand infants experience by building on infants' interests to create learning opportunities.

Early Language Support: Use teacher talk to create a language rich environment. Help infants to learn to express themselves and communicate their needs by initiating and or imitating sounds or words and model turn-taking with infants.



Marbled Hearts

Brianna DeOsca, Education Specialist

Resources: <https://viewsfromastepstool.com/marbled-valentine-hearts/>

Here is an art project that involves your toddler and can be created for a gift or decoration.

Marbled Hearts

YOU WILL NEED:

Paper doilies (white works best)
Foamy white shaving cream
Pink or red (or both) washable paint
Essential oils (optional)

HOW TO MAKE MARBLED HEARTS

STEP 1: In a cookie sheet, squirt shaving cream to cover the surface and drizzle paint over the shaving cream.

STEP 2: Run a toothpick or straw through the paint to get a marbled look.

STEP 3: Place the paper doily on the marbled shaving cream and gently push.

STEP 4: Lift the doily and place it on a paper towel to dry.

STEP 5: Once dry, brush off any excess shaving cream and use your creation for whatever your 'hearts' desire

CLASS Connections:

Facilitation of Learning and Development: Active Facilitation: guide the toddlers in the exploration of the materials and participate in the activity with them to support learning and development. Expansion of cognition: Embed information that is relatable to their lives.

Quality of Feedback: Encouragement and affirmation: give specific feedback and recognition of their efforts or accomplishments.

Language Modeling: Supporting language use: have conversations using back and forth exchanges and open-ended questions.



Shadow Tracing

Brianna DeOsca, Education Specialist

Resources: <https://www.howweelearn.com/groundhog-day-science/>

While February can be consumed with all things Valentines, there is another holiday before the love holiday, Groundhog's Day! This day falls on February 2nd and is 'supposed' to determine whether we have 6 more weeks of summer or not depending on if Phil sees his shadow. A fun story to read before this activity is "Groundhog Day" by Betsy Lewis. After reading the story, tell the children that they will be measuring shadows to see how they change. This activity will work best outside. Here's what you'll need:

- Large white bulletin/butcher paper
- Objects large enough to make a shadow
- Writing utensils (markers, crayons, colored pencils)



Have the children choose an object that they want to trace and something to trace with. Tell the children to put their object on the paper and trace the shadow. You then will write the time on the object. Repeat this 2 more times throughout the day. The next morning post the paper up in the room and go over the findings. Talk about how the shadow moved.

CLASS Connections:

Regard for Student Perspectives: Allows choice, incorporates children's ideas, allows movement.

Instructional Learning Format: Effective facilitation, student interest, clarity of learning objectives.

Concept Development: Prediction/experimenting, producing, integration, connections to real world.

Quality of Feedback: Prompting thought process, providing information, encouragement and affirmation

Language Modeling: Open-ended questions, self-and parallel talk

Cupid Crunch Brianna DeOsca, Education Specialist

Resources: <https://www.everydaymadefresh.com/cupid-crunch/>

Valentine's means sweet treats! This recipe is easy and all age levels can help. The best thing about this treat is that it can be package and sent home as gifts to family and friends.

INGREDIENTS

4 cups Rice Chex cereal
2 cups small pretzel twists broken into pieces
1 11 oz bag of Valentine Day colored M&M's
1 bag of white chocolate chips
¼ cup Valentine Day sprinkles



INSTRUCTIONS

Place the first 3 ingredients into a large bowl, set aside.
In a small microwave safe bowl heat the white chocolate chips on 50% power for 1 minute.
Stir very well.
Microwave on 50% power for 30 additional seconds.
Stir until all the chips are melted.
Pour over the cereal mix, using a rubber spatula, stir until all the pieces are coated.
Pour onto two large sheets of wax paper, creating a single layer.
Sprinkle with the sprinkles.
Allow to harden.
Store in an air tight container on your counter.

CLASS Connections:

Regard for Student Perspectives: Give children leadership roles/responsibilities (cleaning up, passing out supplies, etc.).

Concept Development: Ask children how and why questions about their snack. Encourage the children to brainstorm ingredients and how they go together. Build on children's previous knowledge about recipes and making mixes. Relate this activity to the real world (ask children if they have ever made a mix like this before).

Quality of feedback: If you see that a child is having difficulty completing their task, give them hints to help them better understand the concept. Have conversations about the ingredients and if they can be found in other things to increase children's understanding. Add new information when the opportunity comes up. Encourage and praise children's efforts by using their names, saying what they did and why they did it well.

Managing a child's aggression can be challenging, but understanding the underlying reasons behind a child's behavior is crucial for creating an effective action plan. Aggression in children can stem from various functions, such as sensory needs, escape, attention-seeking, and tangible desires.

What Caused the Fire?

Understanding the Functions of Aggression

Sensory (S): The child's aggression may be a response to sensory overload or a search for sensory input. For example, a noisy environment might overwhelm a child, leading to aggressive outbursts.

Escape (E): The child may use aggression to avoid difficult tasks or situations. For instance, they might hit or kick to avoid doing a challenging homework assignment.

Attention (A): The child might exhibit aggressive behavior to gain attention from adults or peers. Even negative attention can reinforce this behavior if the child feels ignored.

Tangible (T): The child's aggression might be aimed at obtaining a desired object or activity. For example, a child might throw a tantrum to get a toy or snack they want.



Remember: Key Elements of an Effective Action Plan

1. **Identify Specific Behaviors:** Focus on one or two specific behaviors, such as "reducing tantrums during transitions" or "increasing use of words instead of hitting."
2. **Set Realistic Goals:** Establish achievable goals with a reasonable timeline, like reducing tantrums from five times a week to two times a week over the next month.
3. **Develop Specific Strategies:** Create consistent strategies for both school and home, such as using visual timers and giving verbal warnings before transitions.
4. **Collaborate with School and Home:** Regularly communicate consistently between school and home environments.
5. **Maintain Accountability:** Schedule regular check-ins to discuss progress, challenges, and adjustments, ensuring everyone follows the action plan.

Taming Tempers

Jhordan Speed-Johnson, Inclusion Specialist
Continued

How Can You Put Out the Fire?

School & Home Strategies for Aggression

Sensory-Based Aggression

<i>School</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a calm corner with sensory tools (stress balls, noise-canceling headphones, weighted blankets). - Schedule regular breaks for calming activities (drawing and listening to soft music).
<i>Home</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Implement a sensory diet with activities like deep-pressure massages or heavy work exercises. - Integrate sensory activities such as kneading playdough or using a sensory swing. - Reduce sensory triggers by maintaining a quiet, dimly lit environment during high-stress times.

Escape-Based Aggression

<i>School</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Break tasks into smaller, more manageable steps and give positive reinforcement. - Offer choices to give the child a sense of control. - Teach coping skills for asking for breaks or feeling overwhelmed.
<i>Home</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Practice relaxation techniques such as deep breathing. - Use a "first-then" approach to make tasks more predictable (e.g., "First clean up, then play"). - Develop a quiet time routine where the child can take breaks when needed.

Attention-Based Aggression

<i>School</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ignore minor negative behaviors when it is safe to do so. - Use positive reinforcement to praise positive behaviors. - Set clear expectations and consistently enforce rules. - Schedule regular one-on-one time to give focused attention.
<i>Home</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Praise positive behavior and spend quality time with the child. - Have engaging, interactive games that require taking turns and cooperation. - Schedule regular family activities that involve positive interaction and bonding.

Tangible-Based Aggression

<i>School</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Use a reward chart to reinforce positive behavior. - Set clear limits about what can and cannot be obtained through aggressive behavior. - Teach acceptable ways for the child to express their needs.
<i>Home</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create a "choice board" where the child can choose from various activities or rewards. - Implement a token economy system where the child earns tokens for good behavior in exchange for rewards. - Use visual schedules to help the child anticipate when they will receive desired items or activities.

Kindergarten Transition Ideas and Activities

When Talking with Your Child

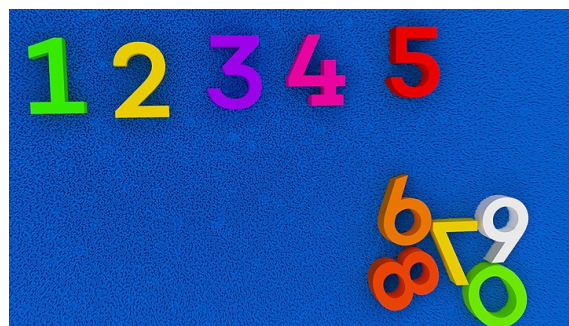
- Ask questions that require more than one-word answers.
- Repeat and build upon what your child says.
- Ask them how and why questions.
- Use new words with your child and encourage them to use new words. Have fun and encourage them to be curious.

When Shopping with Your Child

- Have your child find a letter with their name on a product label.
- Try simple activities such as reading logos of favorite foods and stores.
- Before you go to the store, involve your child in making a shopping list.
- You can ask your child to check the cereal boxes to see if any are almost empty. A four- or five-year-old can check on the supply of milk, extra rolls of toilet tissue and other items. You can consult this list together as you shop. Let your child mark off the items on the list.
- Ask your child to make comparisons (smallest, shortest, heaviest, same as, etc.) of cans and bottles.
- Let your child pick out one vegetable or fruit and identify the beginning sound of its name. What other foods begin with that sound?
- Cut out coupons, and help your child match the coupon to the food item. Let her give them to the cashier.
- Estimate how many carrots (grapes, etc.) are in a bunch and then count the number.

When Riding in the Car with Your Child

- Play —I Spy using words found on billboards and signs.
- Have your child draw a pictorial journal of trip events. You can add dictation about each picture if necessary.
- Keep sing-along or storybook tapes in an activity bag or backpack.
- Drawing materials, large dice, card games, puzzles and books also make great additions.
- Before a long trip, gather information and read about the destination to help your child look forward to the journey.
- Map out points of interest along the way together.
- Look at a clock. Have your child tell what time the trip begins and when they think they will arrive at their destination. Check the time when you arrive.
- Games like —I Spy; searching for animals, letters and numbers; counting colored cars, matching sign shapes, finding silly-named streets, looking for out-of-state license plates or inventing rhymes amuse away the miles.
- When your child's attention begins to wander, switch to another game or take a break. Plan frequent stretch-and-bend stops to satisfy wiggles. And don't forget that favorite pillow or stuffed animal!

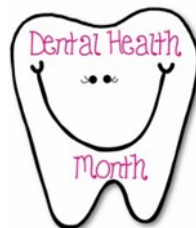


February Fun Brianna DeOsca, Education Specialist

Resources: <https://teachingmama.org/february-preschool-themes-activities/>

February is the shortest month of the year, but it is also one of the months that has the most going on. Here are some of the themes that happen throughout Fabulous February!

- ♥ Valentine's Day
- ♥ Groundhog's Day
- ♥ Black History Month
- ♥ Dental Health Month
- ♥ Community Helpers
- ♥ National Pizza Day – February 9th
- ♥ Kindness Day – February 18th
- ♥ Chinese New Year
- ♥ Presidents Birthdays – George Washington February 22nd and Abraham Lincoln February 12th



T.E.A.C.H

The T.E.A.C.H. (Teacher Education And Compensation Helps) Early Childhood® Scholarship Program funded by the Florida Office of Early Learning provides scholarships for early childhood teachers and facility/family home directors to work toward earning a degree in early childhood education (Associate, Bachelor's, or Master's), an Infant-Toddler Certificate, Florida Staff Credential, Director Credential, National CDA Assessment, or credential renewals.

Your T.E.A.C.H. scholarship will cover the majority of the cost of tuition and books, a per semester student access stipend, a tiered bonus structure for degree-seeking scholars, and much more!

Contact our office today at 877-FL TEACH (877-358-3224) to see how T.E.A.C.H. can work for you.

<https://teach-fl.org/>

T.E.A.C.H. Scholarships



DIVISION OF
Early Learning
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Local Professional Development Opportunities (Training Calendar)

To register for one of our great training opportunities, please visit our website:

<https://www.ecs4kids.org/programs/regional-training-institute/>

Click on the registration link to see a list of available courses.

Click on a course and follow the directions for registration and payment.

The website provides a list of trainings and descriptions offered each quarter.

For CDA information and questions, please contact Danesha Davis, Professional Development Coordinator
904-726-1500 ext.2299
904-536-2119 (cell)





VPK Corner Sarah March, Contract Coordinator

2025-2026 Provider Profiles

As a reminder Provider Profiles need to be updated annually. The 2025-2026 profiles are now available. Please update your profile for the upcoming 2025-2026 program year as soon as possible. Updated Profiles are necessary for the initiation of the 25-26 VPK Provider Applications.

VPK Provider Application Updates

Please remember it is imperative that any changes made to your VPK program during the program year must be updated and submitted through the VPK Provider Application within 14 days of the change. This includes changes in director, teachers, aides or substitutes as well as any calendar or classroom changes.

VPK FAST Reminders and Updates!

NEW PM date link: The link to check your progress monitoring dates on our website has changed.

The new link is: <https://www.ecs4kids.org/providers/vpk-providers/fast-progress-monitoring/>

You will need the email address (user name) you used for Renaissance and your provider ID.

STAR Testy Activity Report: Please remember to check your STAR Test activity report prior to the end of the Progress monitoring Window to ensure all children have been tested. Please keep a copy of the report for your records.

STAR Test Activity Report: Please remember to print out the STAR Test Activity report after your PM Window has closed to keep on file at your center. Please use the Custom dates (progress monitoring window start and end dates) to ensure you are getting the correct information for that specific Progress Monitoring Window. These reports for each PM window need to be kept on file for 5 years. These reports could be requested for monitoring purposes.

Parent letters: Please make sure that the parent letters are given to the parents within seven (7) days from the date of the child being tested and documentation that the letters were given are kept on file for 5 years. These reports could be requested for monitoring purposes.

Testing Newly Enrolled children: Any child that is enrolled in the VPK Program during the Progress Monitoring Window must be tested. Even if they are enrolled one or two days before the end of the testing window. Please ensure that the child's enrollment is added to the provider portal in a timely manner. It may take 24-48 hours for the child's information to update in Renaissance.

Questions: If you have any questions regarding VPK FAST, please contact Roushawn Saunders via email at: Roushawn.saunders@ecs4kids.org or by phone at 904-726-1500 ext. 2241.

Contract Department

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contracts@ecs4kids.org * www.ecs4kids.org



Warm Line 1-800-238-3463

Ext. 2281 (CNBB)
Ext. 2227 (PSJ)



Do you have a concern about the health, development, disability, and special needs of a child? If so, call the Warm Line. The purpose of the warm line is to provide advice to child care personnel concerning strategies, curriculum, and environmental adaptations that allow a child to derive maximum benefit from the child care experience.